



Education Commission  
of the States

# The Progress of Education Reform 2007

## Economic and Workforce Development

Vol. 8, No. 2, August 2007

### What's Inside

- The disconnect among education, workforce development and economic development systems in states
- A brief “How-To” on developing career pathways in your state
- Public policy recommendations for developing a globally competitive workforce in your state

## *Career Pathways: A Strategy for Transforming America's Workforce Education Systems to Support Economic Growth*

The nation's workforce education and training system is experiencing one of the most profound economic shifts in its history. In this globally competitive economy, policymakers and educational leaders are keenly aware that regional economies will thrive or decline based on their ability to attract, cultivate and retain “knowledge workers.” These individuals possess postsecondary educational credentials (though not necessarily a bachelor's degree), technical skills, the ability to learn rapidly, and an entrepreneurial approach to work and career management.<sup>1</sup> In today's economy, workers need these skills to earn family-sustaining wages, and businesses need their employees to possess these skills to stay ahead of global competition. As businesses are largely reliant on public education and training systems to produce knowledge workers, policymakers must ensure these systems work efficiently and effectively.

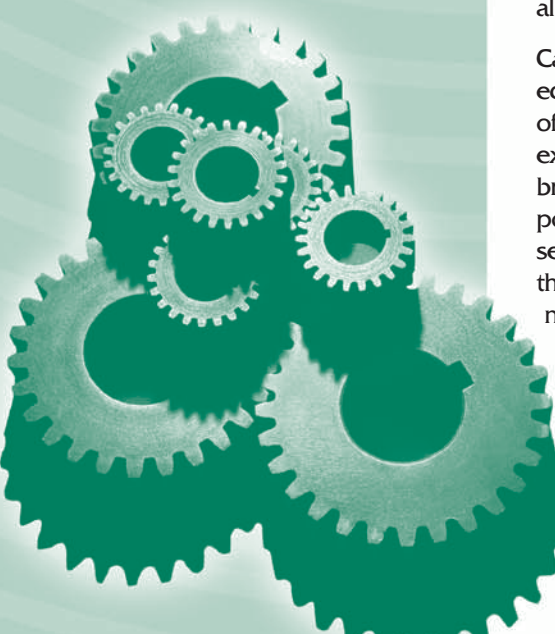
Policymakers are increasingly concerned that the current public education and training systems are neither meeting the rapidly-evolving workforce needs of businesses nor preparing individuals to earn family-sustaining wages. Unfortunately, there have been very few practical strategies that enable states to better align their education system with regional economic and workforce needs.

One interesting innovation gaining traction in a growing number of states is a system of aligned education and training programs called career pathways.

Career pathways are helpful frameworks for making systemic changes that fill gaps in education and workforce-training systems by addressing the complementary goals of student and worker advancement, and regional economic development. With few exceptions, the nation's education and training systems operate in relative isolation from broader economic development efforts, largely because state policies governing adult and postsecondary education, workforce and economic development, and social and human services are designed and implemented with few meaningful connections. As a result, these systems do not effectively work together to produce the kinds of skilled workers needed in today's changing economy.

This issue of *The Progress of Education Reform* features four recent reports by Workforce Strategy Center (WSC) that make the case for implementing career pathways systems as one solution to the problem of system misalignment. WSC is nationally recognized for developing innovative policy strategies and is a leader in implementing state and regional career pathways initiatives. In addition, the reports offer practical strategies for getting state and regional career pathways systems started.

<sup>1</sup> Davis Jenkins. Career Pathways: Aligning Public Resources to Support Individual and Regional Economic Advancement in the Knowledge Economy. (New York: Workforce Strategy Center, 2006).



## Other Resources

### Occupational Supply and Demand System

The Occupational Supply and Demand System is a comprehensive database which provides comparison data on postsecondary degree and certificate opportunities in states and their alignment with current workforce demand and future workforce growth. The resource enables policymakers to determine if postsecondary education institutions are either under supplying or over supplying the workforce with specific skills and expertise. OSDS was developed by the National Supply Demand Consortium with funding support from the U.S. Department of Labor. <http://www.occsupplydemand.org>

### College and Career Transitions Initiative (CCTI)

CCTI provides guidance to community colleges as they create meaningful transitions from high school to postsecondary education. CCTI uses a career pathways framework to contextualize learning for high school students that prepares them to pursue postsecondary education with specific career goals. CCTI is managed by the League for Innovation in the Community College and is funded by the U.S. Department of Education under the authority of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act. <http://www.league.org/league/projects/ccti/index.html>

## Building a Career Pathways System: Promising Practices in Community College-Centered Workforce Development

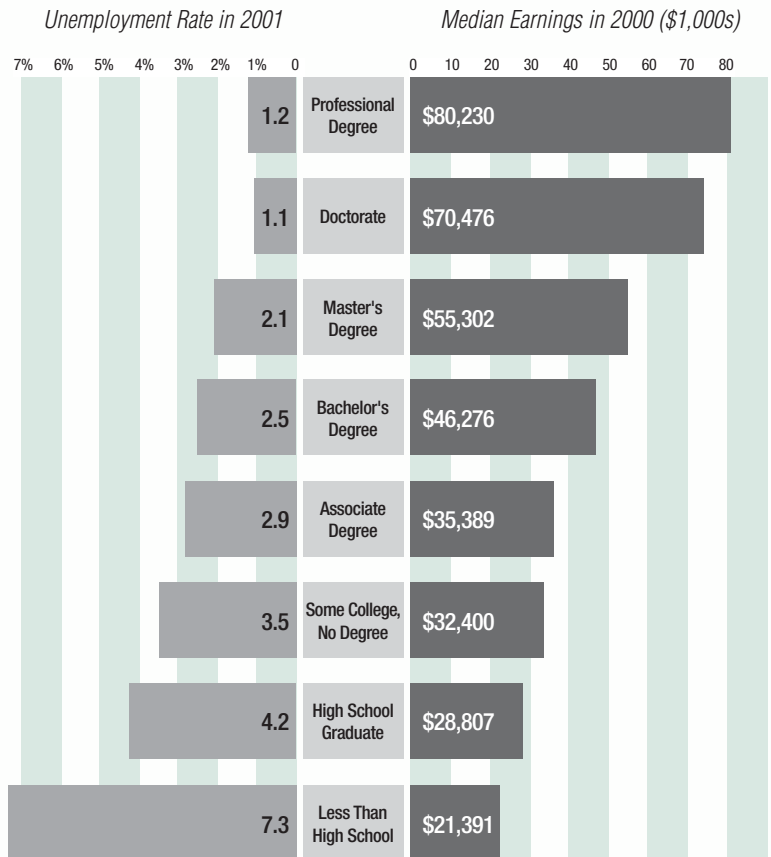
(Julian L. Alssid, David Gruber, Davis Jenkins, Christopher Mazzeo, Brandon Roberts, and Regina Stanback-Stroud; Workforce Strategy Center; August 2002) [http://www.workforcestrategy.org/publications/promising\\_practices.pdf](http://www.workforcestrategy.org/publications/promising_practices.pdf)

Community colleges can play a strong role in the preparation of workers for the 21st century. The report emphasizes the disconnect between credit-based departments, which are focused on degree or certificate completion, and non-credit departments, which are focused on workforce training, customized training contracts with employers and other non-academic programs. In addition, the report explains how community college workforce preparation efforts are often disconnected from state workforce and economic development systems.

A career pathways approach can be a key strategy for bringing together disjointed public systems. Such a career pathway consists of a series of connected education and training programs and support services that enable individuals to pursue careers in specific industries, and to advance over time to successively higher levels of education and work in that industry. Each step on a career pathway is designed to prepare the participant for the next level of work and education. Ultimately, the career pathways framework strengthens the systems that keep a region's workforce globally competitive. This framework allows state and local governments to better align policy goals that simultaneously support student and worker advancement, and regional economic growth.

Since 2002, the career pathways model has been adopted and implemented by several states, including Kentucky, Arkansas, Ohio, Oregon and Washington, as well as by many regional practitioners, public agencies and policymakers across the country.

### Education and Training Pay



**Note:** Earnings for year-round full-time workers 25 years and over; unemployment rate for those 25 and over  
**Source:** Bureau of the Census; Bureau of Labor Statistics  
**Data provided by:** Postsecondary Education OPPORTUNITY, Oskaloosa, Iowa ([www.postsecondary.org](http://www.postsecondary.org))  
**Table taken from:** [http://www.workforcestrategy.org/publications/promising\\_practices.pdf](http://www.workforcestrategy.org/publications/promising_practices.pdf)



## *Career Pathways: Aligning Public Resources to Support Individual and Regional Economic Advancement in the Knowledge Economy*

(Davis Jenkins, Workforce Strategy Center, August 2006)

[http://www.workforcestrategy.org/publications/WSC\\_pathways8.17.06.pdf](http://www.workforcestrategy.org/publications/WSC_pathways8.17.06.pdf)

This report lays out the economic justification for the career pathways approach, describes the process for establishing career pathways, and makes the case for undertaking system reform efforts. The report details demographic trends affecting the labor market and explains how issues such as the growing disparity in earnings among various education levels, the rapid growth of non-English speakers in the workforce and the aging of the workforce necessitate systemic changes and improvements in our education and training systems. The authors illustrate how improving linkages among community partners – including community colleges, K-12 systems, four-year colleges, workforce and economic development agencies, social service agencies, and others – leads to better outcomes for both businesses and individuals. In particular, they assert that working closely with employers can especially strengthen public education and training systems by ensuring that public systems are on target to meet labor market needs.

## *The Career Pathways How-To Guide*

(Davis Jenkins and Christopher Spence, Workforce Strategy Center, October 2006)

[http://www.workforcestrategy.org/publications/WSC\\_howto\\_10.16.06.pdf](http://www.workforcestrategy.org/publications/WSC_howto_10.16.06.pdf)

This report takes a practical look at career pathway development, using examples of promising practices from over 25 sites throughout the country. The report describes a five-stage process for building career pathways. The process includes analyzing labor markets, connecting with employers, facilitating inclusive partnerships with public agencies and systems, fostering continuous improvement, and eventual program expansion. In addition, the report offers lessons learned from many leading career pathways practitioners such as common pitfalls, advice on effectively engaging business partners, and other key strategies for making the most of career pathways efforts. Some of the key lessons learned include:

- ***Relationships built around a shared vision and mutual advantage are the most likely to succeed.*** Partnerships where one member, such as a government agency or political leader, drives a unilateral agenda are at higher risk of failure.
- ***Obtain buy-in from top-level leadership.*** Commitment from top-level leaders is important in any multi-group collaboration. College presidents, company CEOs, agency heads and other leaders can help push for progress when momentum slows. Pathways architects should make sure that those leaders buy in to the pathways concept and are kept apprised of progress.
- ***Go for the “low hanging fruit” first.*** Look for ways to achieve early success and bank credibility, which will help build support for tougher work later. Bring to the table partners who are most willing and able to participate, work with employers who are most eager and involve staff members at partnering organizations who support the concept.

## *Other Resources (cont.)*

### ***The Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) Initiative***

The WIRED initiative supports the growth of regional economies by developing aligned education, workforce and economic development systems which leverage industry clusters in a given region. The program is designed to create a seamless education system that ensures a proper supply of skilled workers for the various industry clusters. The program is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration.

<http://www.doleta.gov/wired/>

### ***Innovation America: A Compact for Postsecondary Education***

(Christopher Hayter, National Governors Association, July 2007)

This compact provides a blueprint for how states and their colleges and universities must work together to align the mission of postsecondary education systems with the economic needs of the regions and states where they are located.

<http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0707INNOVATIONPOSTSEC.PDF>

### ***Center for Law and Social Policy***

CLASP is a national nonprofit that conducts research and policy analysis focused on improving the lives of low-income people.

[www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org)

### ***Community College Research Center***

CCRC conducts research on community colleges to include issues related to workforce development and training.

<http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu>

### ***Keeping America's Promise: A Report on the Future of the Community College***

(Katherine Boswell and Cynthia D. Wilson (editors), ECS, 2004)

Also read this past ECS publication on community colleges and workforce development.

<http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/53/09/5309.pdf>

## *Working Together: Aligning State Systems and Policy for Individual and Regional Prosperity*

(Christopher Mazzeo, Brandon Roberts, Christopher Spence and Julian Strawn; Workforce Strategy Center, December 2006)

[http://www.workforcestrategy.org/publications/WSC\\_workingtogether\\_12.1.06\\_3.pdf](http://www.workforcestrategy.org/publications/WSC_workingtogether_12.1.06_3.pdf)

This final report in the series offers recommendations for state policymakers. The authors suggest that to produce workers with globally competitive skills, state leaders will need to do the following:

- ⊙ Promote student access and improve alignment among systems to ensure that all Americans, especially non-traditional students and low-income adults, have the opportunity to pursue postsecondary education or credentialing.
- ⊙ Support student success by improving efforts that assist students with the completion of academic programs and the advancement of their educations and careers.
- ⊙ Encourage effective student transitions at every level: high school to college, remedial education to credit-bearing programs, adult basic education to postsecondary education, and so on.
- ⊙ Incorporate employer demand and state economic priorities into education and training efforts by working with economic development agencies, employers and others engaged in regional economic development efforts.
- ⊙ Build capacity and finance improvements in student support systems to meet the growing demand for services.
- ⊙ Measure results by incorporating rigorous systems for collecting data and tracking outcomes into the program design.

Numerous examples of promising practices are woven throughout the report to illustrate how various leaders are addressing these key issues. The report highlights the efforts of Kentucky, Ohio, Washington, Oregon and California to improve the alignment of economic development, education and employment policies. These states employ gubernatorial leadership and vision, major state policy initiatives, innovative pilot programs, collaborations with philanthropic organizations, and other major efforts to grow regional economies via career pathways.

Collectively, these reports support the work of policymakers and practitioners in their efforts to improve the economic welfare of their citizens and communities. They offer powerful perspectives on how to reorganize education and training systems, respond to business and substantially improve the performance of all partners within 21st century regional economies. The shift to a global economy requires that state and regional policymakers and educational leaders actively improve the responsiveness of these systems to the needs of workers and employers.

To read these WSC reports, go to [www.workforcestrategy.org](http://www.workforcestrategy.org).

This issue of *The Progress of Education Reform* was made possible by a grant from the GE Fund. It was written by Chris Spence, an associate at the Workforce Strategy Center, who has worked in several states to develop sectoral career pathways systems. Additional content was provided by Bruce Vandal, director of the Postsecondary Education and Workforce Development Institute at ECS. If you have any questions regarding this or other postsecondary/workforce issues, please contact him at [bvandal@ecs.org](mailto:bvandal@ecs.org) or 303.299.3611.



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